

10 KEY COMPONENTS OF DRUG COURT OPERATIONS

from the Missouri Resource Manual for the
Development and Implementation
of Drug Courts

- 1) **Treatment services** – The unique aspect of drug courts is the relationship the criminal justice system has with the treatment system. Many agencies refer persons to treatment programs, as needed, however, the treatment provider in drug court programs is a part of the drug court team; just as the judge or prosecutor are part of the team.
- 2) **Non-adversarial Approach** – Drug court programs are based upon the needs of the participant as opposed to the criminal or civil case that brought them to court. Since no criminal or civil case is being decided, there is no need for “sides” to be heard. The only matter in a drug court is the complete treatment of the drug court participant.
- 3) **Immediate intervention** - Studies have shown that the quicker a person is placed in treatment following a crisis, the more successful the outcome. In drug courts, a person moves from an arrest or other court action to drug court and treatment in less than two weeks. More common adjudication processes may take months. Most of the operational drug courts are voluntary programs. Some jurisdictions around the country, however, have created drug courts with multiple program levels or tracks. One level is for those who meet certain minimal criteria and volunteer for the program. Another level may be for the more serious offenders who volunteer for drug court. Finally, a level, with stricter controls, is provided for those who will not voluntarily opt into the drug court program.
- 4) **Continuum of Services** – Not only is substance abuse treatment necessary, but a host of other services that can affect the changing behavior of the drug court participants. All community agencies and organizations need to be identified in order to provide the best possible holistic treatment to the person and their family.
- 5) **Frequent drug testing** – It is critical that drug and alcohol testing be conducted frequently in order to monitor substance use by the participant. Some drugs do not stay in the system very long (less than 48 hours) so frequent testing is the only way to be absolutely sure that the participant is not using. If persons with alcohol addiction are accepted into the program it’s also important to test BAC levels on a more frequent basis.
- 6) **Graduated sanctions and rewards** - Offender accountability is an important piece to recovery and continued success. The graduated sanctions and rewards are key to developing a characteristic within the offender which is central to their recovery. It is important to note that offender accountability is only possible if the “system” is also accountable.
- 7) **On-going judicial interaction** – A critical element for participant accountability is frequent judicial involvement. Each participant needs to go before the judge to be held accountable for his or her failures and progress. According to national studies and graduation exit surveys, the single most common response why participants succeeded in the program was said to be the involvement of the judge.
- 8) **Program monitoring and evaluation** – Even with extensive planning of the drug court program most programs make changes within the first 3-6 months. It is very important that the teams meet to discuss the process of the program to assure that all elements are working their best. Some Missouri programs have needed to make adjustments because they either weren’t serving the diverse group of offenders or certain groups of offenders weren’t being served as successfully as other groups.
- 9) **Continuing education of team** – since the criminal justice system and treatment are linking together, all professions need to understand the full scope of each profession. It is necessary for the judge, prosecutor, public defender, probation and parole, law enforcement, and juvenile staff to understand all aspects of addiction. On the same hand, it is just as important for all treatment and other service providers to understand the criminal justice process. The more we understand about the entire process the better success the programs will see with the participants.
- 10) **Inter-agency collaboration and coordination** - One of the key elements associated with the success of drug courts, is the collaboration and coordination between agencies, organizations, and private companies. Communities have discovered that many services are available in their areas and offender populations and their families are using the greatest amount of these services. If the service providers and agencies work together, services can be streamlined and more persons can benefit from what is already in the community. Some jurisdictions have also found that some community services providers were unaware of the needs of various agencies. Once this information was shared, the provider was able to make the needed services available in the community.